

## **The "Whys" of Christian Education**

Take some time to consider the "Whys" of Christian education. Here are questions and answers designed to stimulate thinking about why the teaching ministry is essential to the life of the church. Use these questions to sharpen your own thoughts about the purpose of education in your congregation and how your church plans for and implements its teaching ministry. It will be much easier to plan the teaching ministry of your congregation if you know where you want to go in education and why.

### **Partners In Education**



### **1. Why Do We Need a Ministry of Teaching in the Church?**

"The church must teach or die" is an old adage that reminds us that the Christian faith may always be only one generation away from extinction. In its ministry of education, the congregation is able to fulfill its ancient commission to teach persons in this generation the understandings, traditions, faith, and life-styles of the Christian community (Matthew 28:19-20).

At the same time, the demands of the gospel are very personal. The message of the Christian gospel is for each person living here and now. Christian education is essential to the nurturing of persons in the knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a Christian in today's world. Church education has the unique responsibility of enabling Christians to know the faith they profess and to respond to that faith by living in a deliberate manner as God's people, as those who make decisions and act in the light of their believe.

### **2. Why Does Christian Education Need to be as Effective as Possible?**

A major task of teaching in the church is to equip persons to engage in the church's mission in the world. This mission is to persons. It consists primarily of witnessing to persons and communicating the faith in such a way as to enable persons both in the church and outside it to hear and respond to God's word and deed in their common life in the world. Thus it is the responsibility of the church (a) to give as effective a witness as possible both to what God has done and to what God is doing in the world, and (b) to act as God's agents in the working for love, justice, and reconciliation among all people. This can only be done when the church takes seriously its educational ministry and the need of the world for a faithful witness to the gospel.

### **3. Why Does Christian Education Require Careful Planning?**

The teaching ministry of the congregation is too important to leave to chance. Although much education occurs in informal ways, an intentional program for teaching and learning should be undertaken and tailored to serve the needs of the persons in the congregation.

The teaching ministry of the congregation is best seen as inclusive of all the learning opportunities offered adults, youth, and children. The settings for education might include some or all of the following: church school, vacation school, fellowship groups, leisure-time activities, mission and service groups, intergenerational groups, church meetings. Such a wide variety of activities requires a careful selection of

resources appropriate to the various groups.

A plan of education for the congregation needs to include clear goals and expected outcomes. The teaching ministry of the church should lead to new understandings about Christian faith and life. It should be a process by which persons test their thoughts, language, and actions with reference to the Christian message in the context of social and natural world.

A planned program of education for the congregation is strengthened when those responsible for the teaching ministry make provision to equip and support the teachers and leaders, including a variety of pre-service and in-service training events.

Careful planning, then, means that a congregation needs to consider all the ingredients that go into a total ministry -- the needs of persons of all ages, those who teach and those who learn, some clear understandings about why and how people learn and grow in faith, and what resources are needed to accomplish the church's purposes. Such planning requires more than simply building these concerns into a program. It also means continuous assessment of the value and quality of what the church is doing and a willingness to change in order that the teaching ministry may become more effective in the lives of people.

#### **4. Why is the Choice of Teaching Curriculum Materials Important?**

The teaching materials used should support the congregation in achieving its purposes, goals, and hopes. They should be selected in the knowledge that they will in fact help the congregation fulfill its purposes.

Since the choice of materials makes significant differences in the effectiveness of teaching and learning, you will want to select materials that will enable persons to encounter the Christian faith, to find meaning for their own lives, and to commit themselves to discipleship.

Also, you will want to select materials that are based on sound educational principles, that offer both teacher and student help they need to accomplish their teaching and learning tasks, and that are appropriate to the development and skill of both leaders and learners. Otherwise, teachers and materials may work at cross purposes.

Material resources should be selected to meet the variety of needs in the several settings for teaching and learning in your congregation. To stimulate interest and growth, materials should challenge both teacher and students. Materials should be selected to help children and youth grow in their learning from one stage to the next in an orderly sequence. When the mixing of materials from different series for children and youth is being considered, it is important to have this sequence of growth in mind. With adult groups the mixing of materials from several series offers a better possibility of meeting needs and interests and also increases the potential for greater learnings.

Curriculum materials selected to reflect the theological and educational beliefs of the church as well as the needs of both teachers and learners can contribute significantly to fulfilling the teaching ministry of the church.

Adapted from *Developing the Congregation's Educational Program* (Christian Education: Shared Approaches: 1977), pp. 10-11. Used by permission.